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R 112057Z MAR 70  
 FM SECSTATE WASHDC  
 TO AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE  
 INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK  
 AMEMBASSY SAIGON  
 CINCPAC

S E C R E T STATE 035781

TODEL 3994

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

SUBJ: TALK WITH LAO AMBASSADOR

1. LAO AMBASSADOR KHAMKING SOUVANLASI CALLED ON ASSISTANT SECRETARY GREEN MARCH 9 TO ASK DEPARTMENT'S VIEWS ON CURRENT SITUATION IN LAGOS. HE SAID HE HAD NO RECENT NEWS FROM VIENTIANE AND WAS CONSTANTLY BEING QUESTIONED BY JOURNALISTS.

2. GREEN RECALLED WE HAD SAID WE WOULD MAKE PUBLIC NO MORE THAN PRESIDENT HAD SAID IN PRESS CONFERENCES ABOUT OUR ACTIVITIES IN LAOS. INCREASINGLY DISTORTED SPECULATIONS ABOUT OUR ROLE IN LAOS AS WELL AS CONGRESSIONAL AND PRESS INTEREST, HOWEVER, HAD REACHED POINT WHERE IT BECAME NECESSARY TO DISCUSS OUR ACTIVITIES MORE FULLY. DURING OCTOBER 1969 SOUVANNA VISIT WE HAD DEVISED SOUVANNA FORMULA. LAST WEEK IT WAS DECIDED TO APPLY SOUVANNA FORMULA IN THE CONTEXT OF AN AUTHORITATIVE

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State Department review completed

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PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENT DESCRIBING WHY WE WERE IN LAOS, WHAT WE WERE DOING THERE, AND THE GENERAL DEGREE OF OUR INVOLVEMENT. STATEMENT INCLUDED ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF BOMBING IN LAOS AND TOTAL NUMBER OF AMERICANS IN LAOS. MANY PEOPLE HAVE HAD HIGHLY EXAGGERATED NOTIONS OF NUMBER OF AMERICANS IN LAOS. WE DID NOT EXPECT STATEMENT WOULD SATISFY ALL PERSONS BUT IT WOULD SATISFY MOST AMERICANS. OBVIOUSLY WE COULD NOT DESCRIBE EVERYTHING THAT WAS BEING DONE BECAUSE OF OUR OWN, RLG AND RTG INTERESTS.

3. GREEN SAID THE LAO PATRIOTIC FRONT (LPF) FIVE POINT STATEMENT WAS ONE THAT LPF HAD OBVIOUSLY BEEN WORKING ON FOR A LONG TIME AND TIMING OF ITS RELEASE TO COINCIDE WITH THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT WAS PROBABLY COINCIDENTAL. THE STATEMENT CONTAINED MUCH OF WHAT LPF HAD SAID BEFORE BUT IT WAS MORE SPECIFIC THAN USUAL IN CITING A MEETING PLACE AND A PURPOSE FOR MEETING. ITS LANGUAGE WAS MORE MODERATE IN TONE, AND THOUGH ITS PROPAGANDA CONTENT WAS CLEAR, IT PROBABLY ALSO HAD A MORE SERIOUS PURPOSE.

4. WHILE LPF WAS TRYING BY A RIGID PUBLIC POSITION TO DIVIDE AMERICAN OPINION BY BUILDING UP A THREAT OF ANOTHER VIET-NAM IN LAOS, LPF ALSO SEEMED BENT ON BRINGING ABOUT A CHANGE IN LAO POLITICAL ALIGNMENTS WHICH WOULD BE MORE ADVANTAGEOUS TO COMMUNISTS, MEANWHILE EXERTING COMMUNIST TACTICS OF FIGHT-FIGHT, TALK-TALK, HALF-FIGHT, HALF-TALK TO GAIN THEIR ENDS. WE HAD NO INDICATION LAO COMMUNISTS DESIRED A NEW GENEVA CONFERENCE. THEY EVIDENTLY THOUGHT 1962 GENEVA AGREEMENTS WERE ALL RIGHT BUT SOUGHT TO HAVE ZURICH AGREEMENTS REVISED IN MANNER MORE TO THEIR ADVANTAGE BY IMPROVING STATUS OF DEUANISTS AT SOUVANNA'S EXPENSE. WE UNDERSTOOD SOUVANNA HAD TAKEN POSITION HE WOULD CAREFULLY EXAMINE THIS PROPOSAL AND WOULD NOT SUMMARILY REJECT IT. WE THOUGHT THIS A SOUND POSITION.

5. KHAMKING ASKED WHAT WE THOUGHT OF SOUVANNA'S RECENT SUGGESTION THAT IF NVN WITHDREW THEIR TROOPS FROM NORTH LAOS HE WOULD NOT OBJECT TO THEIR USE OF HO CHI MINH TRAIL. GREEN REPLIED THAT BOTH SOUVANNA AND NVN KNEW THAT AS LONG AS NVN USED HO CHI MINH TRAIL WE WOULD HAVE TO TAKE ACTION NECESSARY TO DEAL WITH THESE ACTIVITIES. WE UNDERSTOOD WHY SOUVANNA WOULD WANT TO TAKE LINE HE HAD TAKEN FOR TACTICAL REASONS. IF HE HAD SAID NVN COULD CONTINUE TO USE TRAIL AND U.S. WOULD HAVE TO STOP BOMBING TRAIL, THIS WOULD CREATE A SERIOUS PROBLEM FOR US BOTH.

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6. KHAMKING ASKED IF WE THOUGH NVN WOULD PUSH FARTHER. GREEN SAID WE THOUGHT THEY WOULD AS PART OF BARGAINING PROCESS. HOWEVER IF THEY TRIED TO TAKE OVER WHOLE COUNTRY THEY WOULD SUFFER HEAVY MANPOWER LOSSES AND WOULD PUT THEMSELVES IN DISADVANTAGEOUS PUBLIC POSITION OF CONDUCTING OUTRIGHT AGGRESSION AGAINST LAOS RATHER THAN OPERATIONS DIRECTLY TIED TO WAR IN VIET-NAM. THEY DID, AFTER ALL, STILL RECOGNIZE KING OF LAOS AND GENERAL STRUCTURE OF 1962 GENEVA ACCORDS. IF THEY PUSHED TOO FAR IN LAOS IT WOULD BE HARD FOR THEM TO GET BACK TO THE KIND OF POLITICAL SETTLEMENT THEY PROFESSED TO WANT. WE ESTIMATED THAT WE WERE NOW FACED WITH A POLITICO-MILITARY CAMPAIGN IN WHICH NVN WOULD USE MILITARY POWER TO ADVANCE THEIR IDEA OF POLITICAL SOLUTION.

7. GREEN ADDED THAT THE LAO COMMUNISTS FIVE POINT PROPOSAL REPRESENTED A BARGAINING POSITION RATHER THAN A FINAL ONE. IF RLG MAINTAINED CURRENT DEGREE OF STRENGTH AND COHESION IT WOULD BE IN GOOD POSITION TO BARGIN. THIS WAS MATTER FOR RLG TO DECIDE BUT WE SUPPOSED THERE WOULD HAVE TO BE SOME GIVE AND TAKE.

8. KHAMKING SAID VIETNAMESE AMBASSADOR BUI DIEM HAD TOLD HIM NVN WAS MAKING BIG NOISE IN LAOS AS DIVERSIONARY TACTIC BECAUSE OF LACK OF PROGRESS IN VIET-NAM. GREEN NOTED THAT NVN HAD LOST HALF MILLION MEN IN SOUTH VIET-NAM AND THERE WAS SOME TRUTH IN IDEA THEY COULD ILL AFFORD TO MOUNT OFFENSIVE IN SOUTH BUT THIS WAS PROBABLY NOT SOLE REASON FOR THEIR RECENT ACTIONS IN LAOS. SOUTH VIET-NAM REMAINED THEIR PRINCIPAL TARGET. IN LAOS THEY WERE WILLING TO SHARE POWER BUT WANTED MORE THAN THEY ALREADY HAD.

9. KHAMKING ASKED IF WE THOUGHT LAO COMMUNISTS WOULD AKS FOR HALF THE PORTFOLIOS IN A NEW COALITION CABINET. GREEN SAID THEY MIGHT TAKE LINE THAT DEUANE NEUTRALISTS WERE ENTITLED TO GREATER SHARE OF NEUTRALIST REPRESENTATION BUT POINTED OUT THAT THEY DID NOT CONTROL SHARE OF POPULATION WHICH WOULD SUPPORT SUCH CLAIM. IF FREE ELECTIONS COULD BE HELD RLG WOULD HAVE ADVANTAGE.

10. KHAMKING ASKED IF ATMOSPHERE IN SENATE IN REGARD TO LAOS HAD IMPROVED SINCE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT. GREEN SAID THAT

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THE STATEMENT HAD HELPED BUT CRITICISM CONTINUED. THERE WERE SOME KINDS OF INFORMATION THAT NO GOVERNMENT COULD BE EXPECTED TO DIVULGE BUT WE WERE STUDYING THE RELEASE OF MORE INFORMATION AND IF WE COULD GET AGREEMENT ON PUBLICATION OF THE LAOS TESTIMONY IT WOULD HELP.

11. KHAMKING CITED PRESS REPORTS TO EFFECT THAT IF IT BECAME NECESSARY TO SEND GROUND TROOPS TO LAOS PRESIDENT WOULD ASK SENATE APPROVAL. HE ASKED WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF TROOPS WERE NEEDED AND SENATE REFUSED TO AGREE. COULD PRESIDENT OVERRULE THEM AND SEND TROOPS ANYWAY? GREEN REPLIED THAT HE DID NOT THINK SO. THE PRESIDENT HAD NOT SAID HE WOULD NEVER SEND GROUND FORCES TO LAOS, BUT RATHER THAT IF IT BECAME NECESSARY TO CONSIDER THIS STEP HE WOULD CONSULT CONGRESS. THE CONGRESS DOES HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND DOES HAVE CONTROL OF FUNDS. FURTHERMORE, IT WOULD BE POLITICALLY IMPRACTICABLE FOR THE PRESIDENT TO TAKE SUCH ACTION WITHOUT CONGRESSIONAL CONSENT.

12. KHAMKING ASKED IF THERE HAD BEEN ANY REACTION TO THE PRESIDENT'S LETTERS TO THE CO-CHAIRMAN. GREEN REPLIED THAT THERE WAS NO OFFICIAL REACTION YET FROM MOSCOW BUT TASS WAS CRITICAL. THE USSR WAS IN A DIFFICULT POSITION VIS-A-VIS HANOI. PRIVATELY MOSCOW MIGHT HAVE DOUBTS AND WANT TO EXERCISE DISCREET, GUARDED, LIMITED RESTRAINING INFLUENCE ON HANOI BUT MOSCOW WOULD HAVE TO BE CAREFUL NOT TO PUSH HANOI CLOSER TO PEKING. THE USSR RECOGNIZED RLG AND DID NOT WANT EXPANSION OF THE WAR BUT WE WERE NOT HOPEFUL THAT THEY WOULD TAKE A STRONG LINE. IF, ON THE OTHER HAND, SOME KIND OF NEGOTIATIONS WERE STARTED, THE USSR MIGHT EXERCISE AN INFLUENCE NOT UNFAVORABLE TO RLG. KHAMKING SUGGESTED THAT THE LAO PROBLEM COULD BEST BE DISCUSSED BETWEEN LAO IN LAOS WITHOUT COUNTING TOO MUCH ON ARTICLE 4 CONSULTATIONS. GREEN REPLIED THAT CONSULTATIONS WERE USEFUL AND WE SUPPORTED SOUVANNA'S PROPOSAL BUT, BECAUSE OF OBVIOUS DIFFICULTIES, CHANCES OF FINDING A SOLUTION BY THIS ROUTE WERE LIMITED. KHAMKING SAID THERE WAS A MUCH BETTER CHANCE FOR SUCCESS FROM DISCUSSIONS AMONG LAO THAN FROM RECONVENING A CONFERENCE. UN INTERVENTION, WHICH HAD BEEN SUGGESTED BY SOME OF HIS COLLEAGUES IN NEW YORK, WAS NOT PRACTICABLE BECAUSE 126 COUNTRIES WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO COPE WITH COMPLEX PROBLEM OF LAOS ABOUT WHICH MOST AFRICANS AND LATIN AMERICANS KNEW NOTHING.

ROGERS

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